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ABSTRACT

"Communcacion popular" is an attempt by the peasant classes in Latin America to set up communication channels, independent of the hierarchy of intermediaries, that link them to the ruling elite. This language of liberation is self-reliant and defiant, coloring every aspect of its participants' lives. Its channels of communication are horizontal, not vertical, growing from within instead of being introduced from without. When confronted with the need to communicate on a larger scale, these movements rely on access to radio provided by allies such as the church and on artistic folk expression and small nonprofessional media. The history of colonial empires and patterns of modernization have led many national liberation movements to internal dependence on urban-technical elites and external dependence on the industrialized nations. Churches are also important allies. Also, the public service radio can help generate the new values necessary for lower-status movements seeking liberation from dependency and exploitation. (JL)

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COMUNICACION POPULAR: THE LANGUAGE OF LIBERATION

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The decision of the editors of this issue of MEDIA DEVELOPMENT to use the Spanish term, Comunicación Popular, suggests that this communication experience is very much related to the sociocultural and political process of one region, Latin America. However, it is a pattern of communication that arises in many Third World contexts within lower-status, peasant-worker movements and in national independence movements. Where economic and political power--and power over communicatons--is concentrated in a small traditional elite and/or colonial representatives, lower-status groups must establish their own alternative communications if they hope to have any independent organization and voice.

The first part of this article will attempt to describe the general characteristics of what is called 'comunicación popular' and distinguish it from other communication experiences which bear the English term, 'popular'. The second part will trace the social orgins of 'comunicación popular'. It is a general hypothesis in this article that patterns of communication and uses of the media reflect social structure. To understand comunicación popular, 'people's communication', it is important to examine how the historical process of social change has generated this pattern of communication. The third part will suggest some general criteria for the use of media in comunicación popular.

Part I: What is Comunicación Popular?

Variant Meanings of 'Popular' in Communications

'Popular' as Mass Communications

The term 'popular' often refers to the products of the mass culture industry: 'popular songs', 'popular entertainment' etc. This may simply mean 'having a wide acceptance', but it may also imply a contrast with

the 'high' culture and tastes of a better-educated elite which has more direct access to the centres of national economic, political and cultural decisions.

Since the early Nineteenth Century when the penny newspaper was introduced, formerly isolated communities and marginal, illiterate sectors have been brought into a mass communication system. This is 'popular' in the sense that lower-status groups now have access to newspapers, cinema, radio, television and other media that constitute a national flow of communications. Mass communications are also 'popular' in so far as they aim at a broad common denominator of an audience.

However, the mass media, as they are presently constituted, generally do not engage a large part of the population as active formulators of the message--least of all, the lower-status population. The more general tendency is turn the audience into passive consumers of entertainment with a minimum of critical reflection. Mass communication , in spite of attempts at advocacy reporting and op-ed features, is a centralised distribution of information and entertainment controlled by a specialised professional group of writers and producers. The message comes to its audience like a lustrous vision of another world with its tricks of magical illusion hidden backstage behind the scenes. Broadcasting tends to build the communicator into a larger-than-life personality: the captivating 'star' of entertainment, the president who solves all problems, the pope who is the Church. Only larger than life events--the sensational disaster, rancorous conflicts, or major political events--merit the time and effort of this style of communications.

The technical installations, the production, the paying of 'stars' are all increasingly costly so that only large commercial interests or governments can provide the financial capital. The mass media become

such an important cultural and political factor that they cannot be allowed to escape the control of dominant political and economic interests. The powerless must generally look to another other channels if they wish to communicate among themselves and to the larger society.

The Folk Communications of Peasant Societies

The anthropologist Robert Redfield, in his analysis of traditional folk communities, speaks of the literate or 'great' tradition of the ruling elites and the oral or 'little' tradition of the peasant community.[1] These two traditions, side by side, reflect the dichotomous structure of advanced agrarian societies: semi-subsistence agricultural labourers in many isolated communities and a small group of full-time rulers. The literate tradition is that of the written document containing the official business of government, commerce and the inherited wisdom maintained by those who unify into a nation state over time and space the tribal groups and small peasant communities. The cultural tradition of the peasant sector is passed on quite separately through the oral communication of the story teller, the wandering singer recording events in the folk ballads such as the Mexican corrido. In traditional societies this folk culture tends to be very local, varying from region to region and even from village to village. It is something that is generated at the local level and which is participated in by all. The very isolation of the rural community permits a certain local decision making and local culture.

However, the ruling and peasant sectors are not two societies but two halves of the same society linked by a hierarchy of intermediaries: government officials, merchants, and religious functionaries. These intermediaries pass down to the peasant sector the world view and values of the literate tradition in an ever more simplified version at lower levels. Thus the folk culture of the peasant community reflects the dependency

relations of the larger society. Comunicación popular may incorporate many elements of the folk culture, but it is an attempt to set up communication channels independent of the hierarchy of intermediaries.

The Small Community in Mass Society

Although mass communication is a characteristic of modern industrial society, there are many alternative patterns of communication within local communities, independent organisations and small informal groups. In some countries there are traditions of more decentralised decision making in local government, school systems, churches, etc. There is also a variety of community solidarity events ranging from sports competition with other communities to local community religious celebrations. These activities establish a pattern of social interaction and interpersonal communication which seeks out some more formal media such as a local newspaper or local radio. These 'intermediate' and 'mini' media often encourage considerable local participation and dialogue. This may also strengthen traditions of folk culture with its popular religiosity, community festivals and living oral tradition.

But these are usually the channels of communication of a stable social structure: if the community is dominated by a small but powerful group of propertied interests, the local media are the mirror image of that. If there is a broader, more balanced spread of resources, this also will show itself in the pattern of communications. Comunicación popular arises within a lower-status movement for social change, often in opposition to the stable structure of small communities and in opposition to the established local media.

Communication for Structural Change

One can imagine a peaceful transition from an agrarian society with

its paternalistic ruling families and isolated peasant communities to a modern nation state which integrates communities and regions into a tightly interwoven political, economic and cultural system. As peasant communities are brought into a national communication and market system, they would gain access to national decision making and participate in the just allocation of the new opportunities of modernisation. But traditional elites rarely give up their power and privilege easily. More often, with rapid modernisation, the ruling families become the commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, placing new demands on peasants and unskilled labour and permitting little or no participation. These new demands are seen as unjust and intolerable and the set the stage for the great peasant rebellions such as that of Zapata in Mexico. The efforts to mobilise scattered peasant groups and confront the opposition of large landowners set in motion the patterns of interaction and new cultural expression which is the comunicación popular discussed in this article.[2]

Characteristics of Comunicación Popular

Speaking the Language of Liberation

In my work in Honduras with peasant communities which have been involved in movements to recover land taken from them by large landowners, I have been struck by the radical difference of the world view in these communities in comparison with communities not in the movement. Peasants in the communities not involved constantly interspersed their conversation with the language of fatalism, dependence and helplessness: "We are only campesinos (country people or peasants). We cannot speak. We must get a more powerful and more intelligent person to speak and act for us." "We cannot risk organisation or new methods in farming. We are too poor, too weak, too ignorant."

Those commited to the movement for land recovery had realised that trust in the hierarchy of the powerful to intercede for them in the capital

to defend land rights only resulted in deceit and repression. In desperation they realised that they had only themselves and their unity in organisation to rely on. As they planned action under their own independent leadership and exhorted their neighbors to join them, they quickly invented a self-reliant and defiant language with a new view of themselves and their world. It was a language of conviction that their world should not be this way, that it was unjust and that it would change. "The land is rightfully ours and we will recover it. Instead of a sense of helplessness, they celebrated their own capacity, "We are united and strong." "We have investigated the land titles ourselves. We now know more about it than the politicians and the large landowners."

Many of the leaders of the movement in Honduras were also lay ministers in the Christian comunidades de base which the rural Church was then establishing. These peasant leaders developed their own theology of liberation. "God created the land for all and God wills that all should have enough to eat." "We have read the Bible and we know that God is the defender of the poor."

Thus, the most characteristic aspect of comunicación popular is this new language of liberation which colours every aspect of their life: their life as cultivators of the soil, their religious views, their relations within the community, but especially their relation to the hierarchy of patrons on which they were formerly dependent. It is a language which has arisen out of the common experience of suffering and the reflections of the more perceptive and philosophical among them. It is given authority by their long group discussions. This new language with a new view of history becomes the means by which peasant groups can communicate with other communities and with external allies.

Horizontal Communication Within a Lower-Status Movement

Comunicación Popular in its inception is not any one kind of media such as group media, local radio or published materials. Nor is it the instruction of religious, community development or agricultural specialists speaking to peasants in a simpler language. It arises within a lower-status movement and is peasant or worker groups speaking among themselves or to other similar groups.[3] These channels are socially horizontal in that they do not go 'up' to a communication centre controlled by higher-status individuals and then back 'down' again to other lower-status groups, but are direct from one lower-status group to another. The language and informal channels of communication grow out of interaction within the movement; these are not introduced by outside leadership. Later these patterns of communication may move toward some special medium and may involve sympathetic specialists who can give the necessary technical information or instruction to use a new medium effectively.

Control by Lower-Status Movements

The beginning of comunicación popular is the decision not to rely on traditional authority figures or others with powerful resources to speak for them. If peasants feel they must speak to national authorities instead of going to a more literate person who has good connections, they send their own delegations to national offices and they speak directly to the newspapers or radio. It is impressive to see how peasants or unskilled labourers, with little or no formal education, rapidly become articulate spokesmen at the regional or national level.

Peasant or worker groups rarely have the finances or the technical skills to incorporate the use of any medium except the most simple unless they have outside help. In Latin America where radio is an especially important form of communication, the Church and other groups supporting

the peasant sector have been able to get licences for a radio frequency. Although seldom has the Church allowed peasant groups to have a controlling voice in the management and programming, these stations have been placed at the service of popular movements (In varying degrees, however). The regional or local leadership training centres set up by the Church, labour unions or political parties have been especially important in bringing together peasant groups not only for more formal courses but also for more informal meetings and contacts. In some cases small publishers such as the Centro de Comunicación Popular (Diálogo Social) in Panamá are bringing out materials which peasant and worker groups can use.

Popular movements can speak through these centres, radio stations or publishers, but the financial support and design of the programmes or printed materials comes from these allies. The incorporation of these media as channels of communication for the movement depends on the extent that the media directors understand the objectives of these movements and are willing to subordinate themselves to the peasant leadership. There is always the danger that these media do not really speak the language of the movement or that they simply use peasant and worker organisations for their own ulterior motives.

Participatory Communication

Meetings in these lower-status protest movements appear to be an almost endless process of discussion and debate as the group searches for solutions and plans strategies. Everybody has the right and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The strength of these groups is in unity and the largest number of loyal adherents. The alienation of some who have not been able to express an opinion or have not arrived at a full conviction regarding a decision cannot be risked. Morever, these organisations are precisely fighting against the institutions of a

hierarchical, dependency structure and caudillismo (bossism) or personal ambition is not tolerated.

All social movements represent an intensification of intercommunication. People who have been bound in by a daily routine or by family, ethnic, religious and community barriers begin building new social relations. They are attending meetings, traveling to other communities, participating in regional leadership training courses or mass meetings, and listening to the radio in a way they did not before. The new common language and unifying symbols builds bridges which supersede many traditional social barriers. Lower-status movements of this kind are the basis for a new regional and national integration: people no longer identify themselves only with a particular family or village but with a social class which has suffered similar injustices and which has, on the part of each individual, reached a point of commitment to personal sacrifices and risks. Precisely because of this leveling, participatory process in movements such as those of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the new leadership and government has such widely-based support and legitimacy.

A Process of Concientisation

Popular movements begin with a new view of their situation which has not been handed down to them from the traditional elites. Fatalistic, dependent peasants come to see themselves as capable of making their own history. The poor are rarely willing to risk imprisonment, interrogation, constant surveillance, separation from their families and possible death--the usual lot of persons involved in these liberation movements in Latin America and other parts of the world--unless they have thought through the options. They must be convinced that there are no other alternatives and that their sacrifices will eventually bear fruit. The decision to join in these actions brings the kind of critical awareness that is described by Paluo Freire and others as "concientización". Group media or

other prepared materials can help in this concientisation. But it is the new world view and values of the movement which help participants see clearly the chain of causes that that are influencing their situation.

Using Folk Artistic Expression

Participants in these protest actions are aware that they are making history, and they invent dramatic forms of many kinds commemorate and propagate their new myths, symbolically important events, idealised heroes and dreams of a new social order. Sometimes this may be little more than vivid recounting of the history of the movement in groups or in exhortatory speeches. But it may also find its way into annual commemorations of the martyrs of the movement, popular ballads, religious hymns or folk theatre where that is an accepted form.

Use of Small, Non-Professional Media

The need for lower-status control and wide participation in the communication process indicates the importance of selecting forms of media which are appropriate for small groups, the community, or regional networks.

Part II: The Historical Process of Structural Change and Comunicación Popular

Comunicación Popular as a Process of Structural Change

There is often a tendency to see communication as 'media' and to consider that a process of comunicación popular has been established by introducing a particular medium such as printed materials, radio, group media, folk media, etc. However, if lower-status groups are not experiencing structural tensions and repression which makes action and horizontal communication with other disadvantaged groups imperative, it is possible that the media of comunicación popular will be looked at as just a passing curiosity promoted (or imposed) by well-meaning outsiders. There is also the danger that peasant or worker organisations will be co-opted

by would-be allies who want to experiment with a 'new media idea' or to promote their own 'media empire.' The problem becomes greater when the communication specialists do not appreciate the radical goals of these movements or are caught by cross-commitments to ruling elites.

Without some method of analysis of the historical process which is taking place around one, it is difficult to develop clear criteria for cooperating with popular movements as an outside communication specialist. The sociocultural context and the historical process varies greatly in geographical regions of the world. One cannot propose any method of analysis as the only one. However, most Third World countries, even those which have already experienced a national liberation movement, share in some degree a situation of internal dependence on urban-technical elites and external dependence on the industrialised nations. Morever, the interaction of many Third World countries with the colonial empires of the North Atlantic nations over several centuries has produced a number of common tendencies.

Traditional Structures

When the trading companies and colonial bureaucracies of the European nations extended themselves around the globe, they frequently established their empires on the basis of existing advanced agrarian societies with a dichotomous, relatively simple two-celled structure. There were many variations and exceptions, but essentially it consisted of a sector of full-time rulers with their retinue of counselors, priests and warriors who constituted the decision-making group and the sector of semi-subsistence cultivators and artisans who provided in addition to their own needs a surplus for the maintenance of the ruling sector.[4] The two halves of the society were linked by a hierarchy of intermediaries who performed lower-level governing functions, maintained order and

extracted the goods--and information--necessary for sustaining the decision-making, public-order activities. It was a centre-periphery pattern of communication: the lower-status individuals or groups each related separately to a local patron who passed information up the hierarchy to the centre and then passed back down solutions to lower-status problems. There was little horizontal communication between villages or at least between intervillage networks.

This hierarchical-dichotomous structure was explained and justified by the symbol system generated in the literate tradition of the ruling sector with its wise men, priests and poets. Those in the ruling sector were defined as inherently capable of decision making and sustaining the existing order, and those in the peasant sector, with only their folk, oral tradition were defined as inherently incapable of ruling or of understanding the mysteries of the literate tradition.

There was continual resistance in the lower-levels of the hierarchy to the extractive demands of the rulers, but the system was relatively stable because of the military power of the centre, the imposed beliefs, but also because of the paternalistic concern of the rural elties for the needs of the peasant sector. The power of the centre was increased in so far as there were efficient hierarchical channels of information to the centre and because the centre had a far more differentiated pattern of meanings, capable of absorbing more information. The meaning structure of lower levels was less differentiated so that information was 'strained out' as it passed to the peasant sector. Obviously there was not interest that the peasant-artisan groups have access to significant information so that they could participate in the decision making beyond their own villages.

Incorporation into the European Empires

The North-Atlantic empires established their control over these

regions either by installing their colonial representatives in the place of the ruling elites or by accepting these elites as the intermediaries between the metropolis and the producing peasant-artisan sector. The effect was to move th e centre of information channels back to the overseas metropolis and to make the resident elites the extractors of goods and information responsible to the needs of the empire, but not necessarily to the needs of the native geographical region. The internal extractive demands were increased and the hierarchical communication system was strengthened so that the communication channels were usually even more centralised.

The implantation of the symbol system of the literate cultural tradition of Western Europe accentuated the belief in the superiority of the ruling sector, and this was reinforced by a new or invented racial distinction between the rulers and the native peasant sector.

If the tension between the ruling and peasant sectors was increased by the greater demands coming from the empire and the denigration of native cultural traditions, the ruling elites could now count on the superior military and technical support from the metropolis. Nevertheless, the harshness was mitigated by humanitarian concerns such as expressed in the Spanish Law of the Indies or by the sheer isolation of peasant villages.

The New Phase of Empire in the Nineteenth Century

With the advance of the industrial revolution and the impersonal efficienc of the capitalistic economic system in Western Europe in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, the empires had a new impact on colonial areas. With steam-powered shipping, the introduction of railroads and more rapid communications such as telegraph and then radio, the great world-wide urban markets were created and the extractive demands rapidly increased. National banking and credit systems were introduced into the developing areas. As former colonial areas such as Latin America

gained political independence, ministries of agriculture, industry and education extended technological advisory systems into rural areas. However, this productive capital, technology and education almost always was introduced into the region through the traditional ruling elite sector --which now became an urban-technical sector--and was channeled through the existing hierarchical system to provincial and rural elites. Given the essentially extractive relationship of the hierarchical intermediaries, the new resources were not directed to the peasant sector, but instead increased the extractive power of the rural elites.

This new phase of empire accentuated the social tensions to such extent that the system has not been able to contain them. Whereas before the extraction process was often slow and inefficient, increased demands became rapid and sharp. Lower-status groups were defined more in terms of simple economic, market factors. In many cases with the new markets, land became more valuable and the rural elites moved to expel peasants from land that they had held from time immemorial. Whereas before peasants could often get redress for wrongs through the paternalistic hierarchy, the capitalistic ideology justified their being treated as simply economic objects.

The National Liberation Movements of the Twentieth Century

This sharp increase in the extractive demands placed on peasants in many parts of the world set off the great peasant rebellions such as that of Mexico in 1910, in El Salvador in 1932, and in China.[5] The peasant groups, finding no redress in the traditional hierarchy, cut themselves off from the dependency structure and began to establish their own independent decision making and leadership. These movements developed much as described above in the analysis of comunicación popular.

The same factors of modernisation influencing the rise of peasant

movements were also causing profound divisions in the urban-technical sector. As the validating symbols of the traditional ruling elites were increasingly dominated by the technical-scientific and capitalistic economic-financial orientations, technical and financial information became the most valuable information, and the organisations supplying this information became the centres of communication networks. The humanistic, socially idealistic and--with increasing secularisation--religious symbols were now less important and these social institutions were increasingly marginal. The intelligentsia and other alienated groups tended to break away from the dominant financial-technical sector and build alliances with other aggrieved groups, notably peasant and worker movements.

Popular movements found in these urban-technical allies the organisational, literate and other skills necessary to transform local uprisings into a national coordinated movement. The alliance created a new, more symmetrical power relationship between alienated groups with an elite background and lower-status groups because urban radicals needed the solidary numbers of the peasants and workers to confront traditional elites. This exchange relationship generated new networks of communication channels separate from the hierarchical channels of the modernising ruling elites. Lower-status groups gained access to significant information, both in the national, urban sector and internationally, outside of linkages with the financial-technical centres of the North-Atlantic nations.

This alliance, including peasants, urban workers, intellectuals, technocrats frustrated with government corruption and inefficiency--and in Latin America, religious leaders--has formulated an alternative symbol system and new socio-political and cultural goals for the nation. Central to the new symbols is the validation of the indigenous culture and the

and the appreciation of lower-status, less Europeanised groups as sources of national culture.

The Alliance of the Church With Popular Movements in Latin America

Although nearly all of the national independence movements in the Third World have had their base in a widespread and spontaneous protest movement of peasants and workers, none have been successful in achieving an enduring transformation of the social structure without the support of urban-technical allies.[6] These urban allies have been able to take the popular aspirations and translate them into the economic, political, legal institutions of a modern nation.

In a number of countries of Latin America the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, have in various degrees become important allies of these popular movements.[7] The Church has been playing a similar role in the Philippines, India and in some of the new nations of Africa. A brief analysis of the social influences in the transformation of the Church in Latin America in the last twenty or thirty years suggests how the Church can relate to processes of comunicación popular.

At the very outset of the colonial period in Latin America the Church established a general missionary policy as 'defender of the Indians' against the genocidal exploitation of the native peoples by the conquistadores. Under the leadership of the Dominican priest, Bartolomé de las Casas, the Church was a major influence in persuading the Spanish imperial government to institute the Law of the Indies which included many measures protecting Indian communities.[8] Although this was never implemented consistently or completely, a tradition within the Church as "defender of the Indians" persisted throughout the colonial period.

As a condition for the Law of the Indies, however, the Church

came to be dependent on the civil government for the patronage of religion and morals. Increasingly during the colonial period and during the period after independence from Spain, the Church came to rely on political force to protect its cultural and religious influence. This served the Church well as long as major political elites shared the interests of the Church. It also meant that the Church was committed to supporting the hierarchical social structure and political control system of the ruling elites.

This mutual support system of the Church and the political oligarchy began to come apart as the governing elites became a part of the North American economic sphere of influence. First, there was a rapid process of modernisation and secularisation of the urban-technical sector, weakening religious values. Second, a more differentiated, pluralistic society developed, and governments ceased to support the Catholic Church as the sole religious and ideological influence. When the Catholic Church saw that it now had to compete with Protestants and various idealistic leftist movements, it was forced to adopt a quite different communication strategy with isolated peasant communities and the new uran working class.

The Church generally found increasingly less support from the educated, technically-oriented, secularised middle classes. In this context the Church turned to those whose religious faith was strongest--the peasants and the urban working-class immigrants who still retained the faith it its peasant background. The Church intensified the structure of religious organisation in rural parishes, emphasising religious education, personal religious commitment and training of lay religious leaders to make up for the lack of clergy. The traditional peasant religious leadership was just as alarmed as the clergy at the growth of Protestantism and secularised attitudes and supported the new pastoral approaches.

The revitalisation of the Catholic Church in the rural areas coincided with the rapid deterioration of the socio-economic situation of semi-subsistence peasant farmers mentioned above. The new programmes of agricultural credit, technical assistance and marketing followed the hierarchical lines and benefited the large commercial farmers. The peasants in isolated communities not only were left without the benefit of better education, health and agricultural extension but were increasingly exploited as a factor of cheap labour for the economic expansion of the larger farmers.

As priests and other religious leaders in the new rural pastorate came into closer contact with the daily life, neglect and exploitation of the peasant, they were touched by the needs of these families and began to help to supply the lack of government services. The Church committed itself to a wide range of rural development programmes: adult education (radio schools); credit, marketing and production cooperatives; health clinics; etc. This led many priests and religious into a closer alliance with peasant leaders and a deeper study of the roots of the social, economic, and political problem of peasants.

It was apparent to some Church leaders that most of this rural development activity was not reaching the roots of the problem of the peasant, and they were led to an ever more radical commitment to support of mass organisation of peasants, agrarian reform and profound changes in the rural power structure. The Church was inevitably brought into conflict with large land owners and the ruling elites. This alienated secularised rural and urban elites from the Church even more and threw the Church back on the support of the lower-status peasant groups. It was a point of no return. The Church began to find that its concern for the peasants and those in the poor <u>barrios</u> in the cities coincided

with other disident, urban-based groups in the university or in more radical labour organisations. The Church found itself a part of the communication channels linking togtner peasant-worker movements and various urban allies in a national independence movement.

Peasant groups found in the rural parish structure,with its leadership training centres, small radio station and system of educational programmes reaching into remote communities, a ready-made pattern of local and regional communication channels.[9] In many cases the Church began providing the external structure for the process of comunicación popular.

However, with the radicalisation of these popular movements, the Church found itself with many pastoral and theological dilemmas. Shouldn't the Church be working with all Christians, rich and poor alike? Could the Church with its doctrine of 'love of neighbor' be involved with increasingly more violent confrontation? Could religious organisations of lay people actively promote social justice when this had such obvious political implications? Was not the Church simply making itself the instrument for the international Communist takeover? Could bishops permit pri[illegible], religious and lay leaders to spend much--if not all--of their t[illegible]e in activities of rural development and peasant organisation which was not overtly religious? This was, in effect, a questioning of the Church's alliance with processes of comunicación popular.

Among those who shared most deeply the suffering and exploitation of peasants and workers, the debate evolved into a theology of liberation. Those closer to rural elites in provincial towns and cities and those living in the milieu of the Westernised capital city looked on with alarm at the alliance of the Church with popular movements. This has set up a conflict in the commitment of the Church, with its communication facilities, to the evolution of new patterns of comunicación popular.

All urban-technical allies--no matter how 'pure' their revolutionary ideology--share these dilemmas to some extent and share also the danger that they may simply be co-opting the long-suffering poor for their own interests. It is helpful to examine these dilemmas and dangers in terms of one institution of potentially great usefulness to comunicación popular, the local cultural-educational radio station with public-service objectives.

Part III: Criteria for the Use of Media in Comunicación Popular: The Case of Local, Public-Service Radio

There is now increasing discussion of community-level, public-service radio and community-controlled programming in radio and television in Canada,[10] the United States,[11] and Britain.[12] The major development of local, cultural-educational radio in the Third World countries is occurring in Latin America. One of the early forms of this was Radio Sutatenza in Colombia, established in 1949 to broadcast programmes of basic education and to promote campaigns for the improvement of health, agriculture and community development. As Radio Sutatenza evolved into Acción Cultural Popular (ACPO), it became one of the typical forms of involvement of the Church in rural development described above. The relative success of ACPO influenced the establishment of some 75-100 other similar radio stations, nearly all Church-sponsored, in various Latin American countries. These small, local stations in provincial towns are meant to serve the lower-status rural families involved in semi-subsistence agriculture. Many, in varying degrees, have developed some form of support for the process of comunicación popular in their regional areas.[13]

1. Regional Networks for Comunicación Popular

Most of the radio stations in question are small one to five kilowatt units covering the service area of a market town (a radius of 30-50 kilometres) which constitutes a regional intervillage system. The market

towns where the stations are usually located are the centres of regional road systems; bus lines; commercial trading; provincial government with health, education and agricultural services; and religious organisations. This regional system forms an already-established, self-contained communication network. However, the governmental and commercial communication channels tend to follow the hierarchical lines of the traditional social structure: from regional offices to local rural elites (larger landowners, merchants, political leaders, etc.).

The cultural-educational radio station enters this communication pattern at a different social level because the Church tends to work with lower-status peasant groups and because it frequently starts as a literacy campaign aimed at lower-status, semi-subsistence peasants. The radio schools are introduced into rural communities through the organisational structure of the rural parish and the network of religious leadership among peasants in rural communities. The radio school programmes frequently have evolved into a lower-status communication network based on: 1) a series of neighborhood-level organisations for men, women and youth; 2) paraprofessional peasant promoters of neighborhood organisations who visit isolated communities on horseback or on foot; 3) monthly meetings of neighborhood leaders in parish centres; and 4) a regional training centre in the market town for short courses in community ortanisation, cooperatives, health and agriculture. In time this network often forms the basis for federations of credit, consumer and/or marketing cooperatives, small-farmer special-interest organisations and rural women's organisations.

The radio stations are established not simply for general educational broadcasting, but find their core audiences among the participants in these various organisations.[14] The programming of the radio station reflects the same world view, sets of interests and language which have evolved in the

in the years of discussion which have taken place in meetings, adult education courses and short leadership training courses. The radio station can be an important factor in shaping the common language of liberation in a regional social movement.

Many of these radio stations serve as a central communication exchange within the regional system of peasant organisations. A section of the daily or weekly programming is alloted to each type of audience, organisation, educational programme or educational-development campaign. 'Prime time' programming is usually a broad cultural cultural and community-service programme which discusses current peasant problems in the area. Frequently local leaders prepare their own programmes with some help from the station's technical staff or peasant leaders are interviewed directly in their communities. Since lower-status groups in rural areas of Latin America do not have telephones, newspapers or door-to-door postal service, local radio supplies this function. In this case, the radio is a medium for peasant leaders to be in contact with their organisations in remote communities and a medium for leaders in one community speaking to those in another community.

This form of radio indicates how a particular medium can support comunicación popular, but the dangers are also apparent. Because the stations are conceived of as 'educational' they may emphasise technical information and a reformist attitude which is unrelated to the needs of profound social change in the region. It is much safter to teach mathematics or the use of fertilisers than to discuss specific incidents of exploitation or land reform. It is also easy to fall into the broadcasting pattern of canned music, telenovelas, and the sensational but superficial news flash style--heavily larded with advertising--typical of other local commercial stations because this is what the audience is accustomed to. Introducing

a format adapted to comunicación popular requires additional time and skills which many such radio stations cannot or will not make available.

News programmes can specialise in local events, often stressing local advocacy or peasant interest-group action which would not ordinarily be reported or least with not the same sympathetic detail and conci ntising analysis. But station managers have to be in full sympathy with peasant groups, have a sense of what are the historically significant issues and be within the internal communication currents of peasant movements. All this demands a new type of 'liberation journalism'.

2. The Control of Media in Comunicación Popular

Whenever specific media such as local radio or publications are introduced into the process of comunicación popular, the initiative rarely has come from peasant or worker leaders but rather from sympathetic allies with more educational, technical and managerial background. The control of the media generally remains in the hands of an institution which has its base in the urban-technical sector. Access is given to popular organisations, but few radio stations have developed mechanisms for a substantial representation of peasant or worker organisations in the management and programming. Surprisingly, there is far more progress in real local cooperative control of community radio in Canada and Britain than in Latin America where there has been so much discussion of participatory communication. A rare exception in the question of peasant control in Latin America is Radio La Voz de Atitlán (The Voice of Atitlán) in Guatemala directed by the leaders of native Indian groups with some technical support from the Church.

It may be argued that the managers are usually deeply involved with or sympathetic to the popular movements and are just as much a part of the movements as the peasants themselves. It is also argued that peasant

groups do not have the technical skills to manage or even be involved at the policy-making level of radio stations or a publishing house. Furthermore, in this view, popular movements are volatile, with much internal rivalry and conflict. Popular control would, in some cases, be the control of one particular faction to the exclusion of large segments. The media serve better when there is a more autonomous neutral management, supportive of social change but somewhat distant from the continuing debate within the leadership of the movement.

However, one can also argue that unless popular organisations have more direct control and responsibility over general policy and programming, the medium is going to remain outside the main horizontal channels of communication. The rivalries, debates and internal conflict are an integral part of comunicación popular as the movement gains a clearer view of what it is trying to achieve. What an autonomous, more detached medium might gain in the professional technique and assurance of access to all parties, it loses in authenticity and real interest for the people. The mechanisms for more popular control will vary considerably with the circumsntances, but some real influence over the channels of communication is the key issue in comunicación popular. Perhaps the main role of the allies of comunicación popular is not to manage the media themselves, but to train peasant and worker groups to design and manage these by themselves.

3. Projecting a New Cultural Synthesis

Comunicación popular generates a new vision of the social world and a new understanding of the real causes of lower-status dependency and exploitation. It also generates a new view of history and new forms of artistic expression in music and folk drama. A medium such as regional radio can be an important factor in picking up this inchoative culture and solidifying its social acceptance within a region. Some stations,

have refused to play the English-language rock music from the United States and emphasise the local folk music or the Latin American 'protest' music. Some stations may occasionally sponsor festivals of local, peasant music or song-writing contests as a means of stimulating creative artistic expression in the region.

On the other hand, many stations take an instructional stance: a bearer of outside information, skills, 'high culture' to the people --stressing the specialist, professional style--rather than picking up the cultural expression, information and new skills developed in the area to diffuse within the region.

Since many of these stations are religiously sponsored, a part of the programming is religious, and a sensitivity to local popular religiosity (popular in the same sense as popular in comunicación popular) and local religious symbols is important. There has been considerable study of popular religiosity in Latin America, but this is not being translated into the catechetical materials and the media for comunicación popular --with outstanding exceptions in countries such as Peru. Priests, religious and lay leaders are trained in traditional theological approaches in seminaries and other institutions, and they are rarely equipped with some method for detecting the religious symbolism and religiosity native to their region so that this creative expression can be stimulated as one dimension of comunicación popular.

A Final Word

This article has stressed that comunicación popular is not just media or specialists speaking to lower-status groups in the language of peasants. The basis of comunicación popular is a new language of liberation, new values, a new view of history--in short a new culture generated within lower-status movements seeking liberation from dependency and exploitation.

This new culture is of great importance because it is represents a pattern of life much more in tune with the social and physical ecology of the new nations in the Third World. These countries have frequently had a North-Atlantic culture imposed on them at least the urban-technical level. This is most destructive of the creativity of these new nations. Much of the discussion of the New International Information Order debate has centered around the question of encouraging indigenous cultures. These cultures are not going to be prefabricated by communication specialists nor hopefully will it depend on the media alone because the media managers are sometimes those most alienated from the native cultural patterns. Rather it will be forged within lower-status movements linked with urban-technical allies that are incorporated into these movements. It is important for communication specialists to be aware of the processes by which these new cultural expressions develop so that they can give the process their support.

Footnotes

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